Devil’s Slide Trail
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Kathy Switky

Devil’s Slide Trail
A San Mateo County Regional Trail

Devil’s Slide Trail
This 1.3-mile-long trail is built on what was once a treacherous stretch of Highway 1 and the site of frequent landslides, accidents, and closures. When the Tom Lantos Tunnels opened in 2013, the San Mateo County Parks Department began converting this segment of the old highway to this public multi-use, non-motorized trail.
The trail opened in 2014, and offers spectacular ocean views and unparalleled opportunities for viewing birds and marine mammals.
The Devil’s Slide Trail is a section of the California Coastal Trail, which will extend 1,200 miles from Oregon to Mexico.
Trail geology
Devil's Slide Trail offers a great demonstration of coastal geology. At the south end of the trail, the weathered rock face is the granitic rock of Montara Mountain. In contrast, at the north end, rough sedimentary layers of shale and sandstone—once ocean floor—have been thrust up and folded over millions of years. Landslides in this area occur where the sedimentary layers were thrust over the granitic rock.

Millions of years of upward pressure has weakened and broken these cliffs. At the same time, the pounding surf washes away the bottom of the slide. Devil's Slide continues to move into the Pacific Ocean, part of the natural process that shapes our ever-changing coastline.

Wildlife
Opportunities to see wildlife along the trail are abundant. Trail users may see raptors overhead, such as Turkey Vulture, Red-Tailed Hawk, and Peregrine Falcon. Songbirds in the area include Song Sparrow, Bewick's Wren, and Golden-Crowned Sparrow.

To nest in remote places where predators cannot easily reach chicks or eggs. The offshore rocks and cliffs are perfect spots for Peregrine Falcons, Brandt's Cormorants, Western Gulls, and Common Murres. The fencing and native vegetation hides hikers and visitors so the birds can nest without fear or disturbance. Please respect their privacy.

Offshore, you may see marine mammals, including gray whales migrating from their winter breeding grounds in Mexico and their summer feeding habitat in the Arctic. Look for spouts or splashes that indicate whales or other marine mammals.

A legacy of land protection
The growing coastside population led to the passage of the California Coastal Act in 1976. Nearby protected areas include three National Marine Sanctuaries and state Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) managed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Fitzgerald Marine Reserve, just to the south in Moss Beach, is both an MPA and a San Mateo County Park.

The California Coastal Act protects these marine areas and the shoreline through a partnership between San Mateo County and the California Coastal Commission.